

TIMES RECORD

Democrats introduce 'Small Business Bill of Rights'

BY LESLIE TALMADGE

Times Record Staff SEP 10 2004

BRUNSWICK

House Majority Leader John Richardson, D-Brunswick, and a group of Democratic state representatives have been meeting since February to craft a plan to improve the business climate in Maine.



**JOHN
RICHARDSON**

The group's primary focus is to encourage the growth of small businesses in the state. At a successful small business in Augusta today, they unveiled their plan, which will be presented at upcoming forums where they will solicit input from small business owners.

More than 97 percent of all Maine businesses are small businesses; small businesses employ 61 percent of all Maine workers, according to the Small Business Bill of Rights drafted by Richardson and his working group. Therefore, "Maine small businesses have the right to be

treated like large businesses, with reasonable access to the same incentives and services," according to the Bill of Rights.

The Democratic plan contains three main components: Contain costs, reduce paperwork and streamline the regulatory process; mobilize state resources on behalf of small businesses; and create an environment that fosters small business growth in Maine. Specific proposals include reducing the cost of workers compensation for small businesses; establishing a business court to expedite business-related litigation; establishing an Internet-based centralized online application system for all state permitting; expanding seed capital funds to assist small businesses currently not benefiting from seed capital programs; helping repay loans for students who live and work in Maine; reducing the capital gains tax for investments and re-investments to encourage investment in Maine's small businesses; and establishing an entrepreneurial curriculum at each community college.

When asked to comment on the Democrats' proposal, Rep. Robert Berube, R-Lisbon, said

Local firms sponsor candidates forum

The Times Record

BRUNSWICK

A candidates forum designed to allow representatives of local businesses to ask questions of candidates running for state office is scheduled to run from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Modular Advantage on Farley Road.

While the focus of "The Pro-Business Candidate Forum" will be on Maine businesses and the economy, everyone is invited, said organizer Rich Cromwell.

The meeting will allow people to ask questions about the state's economic future.

Cromwell had a few of his own questions about the state.

"Why does Maine rank in the bottom 10 percent of nearly all business indicators and our neighbor New Hampshire ranks in the top 10 percent?" he asked.

With the business climate the way it is in the state, Cromwell sees Maine becoming more of a service-oriented state instead of one with manufacturing jobs.

"We need a solid business base in the state, and we really don't have it," Cromwell said.

In addition to possible changes in the tax structure in Maine, he believes the state should cut spending.

He could not give examples of where the cuts could be

made, but said that Maine ranks near the top of per-person spending by state and local government.

Candidates from Bath, Brunswick, Topsham Harpswell, Phippsburg, Richmond, Woolwich, Bowdoin and Bowdoinham have been invited, according to Cromwell.

The keynote speaker will be William Becker of the Maine Heritage Policy Center. The center's mission is to promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise and limited, constitutional government, according to its Web site.

For more information about the event on Saturday, call 725-2922.

that he supported any program that helps small businesses, but he was skeptical. "It sounds good on paper, but how are you going to do it?"

"There were six workers' comp bills introduced during the 121st Legislature. John Richardson voted for every one, which increased the cost of workers comp," Berube

said. He also criticized the plan for its lack of specifics.

Responding to critics' charges that the plan lacked specifics, Richardson said, "They ought to be blessing this attempt and jumping on board."

"Democrats are the party of small business and we need to listen to those struggling to

make business survive and thrive in Maine," he said.

For more information about upcoming forums and to sign up for an electronic newsletter regarding small business issues, visit www.legislature.maine.gov/housedems.

ltalmadge@timesrecord.com